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June 6, 2005

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member
House Committee on Education
and the Workforce
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Miller:

On behalf of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the largest national constituency-based Hispanic organization in the U.S., I write to thank you for introducing the "Teacher Excellence for All Children Act of 2005" (TEACH). This legislation would provide teachers with the training and support needed to provide all U.S. students with high-quality instructional services, and would particularly help improve the educational status of Hispanic students.

Latinos numbered more than 8.1 million in American public schools in 2000, making them the second-largest segment of the U.S. school population after Whites. English language learner (ELL) students have contributed significantly to this growth. For example, during the 2000-2001 school year, there were a reported 4.7 million ELL students enrolled in public schools, accounting for 9.8% of the total K-12 public school enrollment and approximately 46% of the Hispanic enrollment that year.

In addition, Latinos are a large segment of the student population in the nation's largest school districts. Specifically, Latinos are one in two (49.6%) students in Austin, nearly four in ten students in San Diego and New York City (39.7% and 37.8%, respectively), and about three in ten students in Boston and Houston (28.4% and 31.3%, respectively). Therefore, for large school districts, and for the nation's public school system overall, to be successful, student achievement and graduation rates for Latinos must improve.

Unfortunately, while the number of Latinos attending schools is growing, their educational achievement and high school completion levels are significantly lower than that of their non-Hispanic peers. For example, between 1992 and 2003, reading scores on the eighth-grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) increased slightly more for Whites (from 267 to 272) and African Americans (from 237 to 244) than for Latinos (from 241 to 245). Math NAEP scores show the same trend, with Whites (from 277 to 288) and African Americans (from 237 to 252) showing greater increases over that period than Latinos (from 249 to 259).

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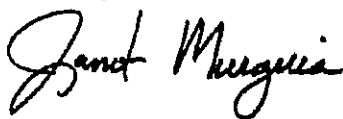
LA RAZA: The Hispanic People of the New World

Low achievement figures for Latinos translate into poorer high school graduation rates. For example, in 2000, only about six in ten (64.1%) Latinos ages 18 through 24 graduated from high school. By comparison, more than eight in ten (83.7%) African Americans and nine in ten (91.8%) Whites of the same age group graduated from high school that year.

Our nation's public schools must work to improve the achievement and attainment of Hispanic and ELL students if they are to be considered excellent. If students are to meet more challenging academic benchmarks, they must have access to high-quality instruction. Yet, minority students are more likely than White students to be in schools with unqualified, often ineffective teachers. About two-thirds of Latino, African American, and Native American eighth-grade math students have teachers who do not have an undergraduate degree in mathematics, compared to half of all White students.

The "TEACH Act" would ensure that our nation's teachers receive the training and support they need to provide high-quality instructional services to all students, including Hispanics and ELLs. NCLR strongly supports the "TEACH Act" and urges its adoption by the House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Murguia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet Murguia
President and CEO